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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000706

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA: RECALIBRATING MACEDONIA POLICY

REF: SOFIA 000511

Classified By: Classified by CDA Susan Sutton for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Bulgaria added a new wrinkle to its long-standing policy of support for Macedonia's EU/NATO accession when, in November, PM Borissov proposed to his Macedonian counterpart that the two countries sign an update to a 1999 joint agreement on bilateral relations. Our contacts insist Bulgaria will not become an outright obstacle to Macedonia's integration even if it does not sign the agreement, but we detect a growing quid pro quo undercurrent in our discussions with members of the new government. The document addresses a host of Bulgarian complaints about what Sofia sees as Skopje's reluctance to engage in "good neighborly relations." Our contacts claim that signature would "guarantee" Bulgaria's "unconditional" support for Macedonia, but we are not so sure. It is evident that the new government is recalibrating its Macedonia policy and it is not clear whether simple signature -- or actual implementation -- is what Sofia is after. END SUMMARY.

BORISSOV OUTLINES CLEAR PATH FOR UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT

¶2. (C) PM Borissov met his Macedonian counterpart in Sofia November 16 at PM Gruevski's request. Borissov's foreign policy adviser described the short meeting as a Macedonian attempt to ensure Bulgaria's support in the since-postponed December 2009 accession date talks. In the course of the meeting, Borissov handed over a four-page "Agreement for Friendship and Good Neighborly Relations" which he proposed the two countries sign. The text, an update to a 1999 bilateral agreement, was first submitted to Macedonia in December 2008. This updated agreement covers the same ground as its predecessor, but also addresses more recent Bulgarian concerns, including the use of anti-Bulgarian "hate speech" in state-controlled and -influenced media and neglected Bulgarian military monuments and graveyards in Macedonia.

¶3. (C) Our MFA and Council of Ministers contacts tell us Bulgaria will support Macedonia's accession to the EU and NATO, including the securing of a date for opening EU accession talks, even if Skopje does not sign the new agreement (and it was prepared to make good on this promise at the December Foreign Affairs Committee meeting.) Still, our contacts say they see the signing as an indication of good faith that Macedonia is willing to work on issues of increasing concern to Bulgaria. The Prime Minister's foreign policy adviser told us that the signing of the document would "guarantee unconditional Bulgarian support" for Macedonia's integration into the key euro-atlantic institutions. Without signature, he said Bulgaria would not block Macedonia's EU bid, but many top government officials are clearly frustrated with what they see as the Macedonian government's lack of sensitivity to Bulgaria's concerns while seemingly taking Bulgarian support for granted.

COMMENT

14. (C) Our contacts deny Bulgaria has changed its stance on Macedonia, saying what we are seeing is not a change in policy, but rather a "re-articulation" of old policy. Regional security is still Bulgaria's focus, and Sofia agrees that this can best be secured through Macedonia's EU and NATO accession. But the new government is much less willing than the last to accept what it perceives as Macedonian slights. There are also internal political gains to be made by recalibrating Macedonia policy. By demanding signature of the resurrected 2008 document, the PM appeases (and outflanks) nationalist party ATAKA, on which his minority government depends in Parliament. We do not think Bulgaria will become a new obstacle to Macedonian integration on the order of Greece (at least not at this point), but Sofia's new demands and willingness to raise its concerns in EU forums could provide support and backing to other member states less supportive of Macedonian integration.

SUTTON